

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, &
Professional Papers

Graduate School

2007

Creation of the Big Sky African Ensemble

Philip Michael Johns

The University of Montana

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Johns, Philip Michael, "Creation of the Big Sky African Ensemble" (2007). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 1227.
<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/1227>

This Professional Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

CREATION OF THE BIG SKY AFRICAN ENSEMBLE

By

Philip Michael Johns

BME University of Montana,
Missoula, MT

Professional Paper
presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts
in Fine Arts, Integrated Arts and Education

The University of Montana
Missoula, MT

Summer 2007

Approved by:

Dr. David A. Strobel, Dean
Graduate School

Dorothy Morrison, Chair
Fine Arts

James Kriley
Fine Arts

Randy Bolton
Fine Arts

Creation of the Big Sky African Ensemble

Chairperson: Dorothy Morrison

In my final creative project, my primary goal was to reshape and redefine an existing course at Big Sky High School and in so doing to reshape and redefine myself as an artist. In the process of creating the African ensemble, I had to examine the cannons of my formal musical training to include an exploration of new avenues of expression and creativity. I had to creatively problem solve and overcome many obstacles while developing and maintaining a viable high school course. The changes I endured helped to reshape my artist self. Through my experience in preparing my final creative project, I learned I have the skills to develop and implement an arts' curriculum in which I could actively participate and grow as an artist and teacher. I gained insight into areas of myself and career which had remained dormant or undiscovered. While I developed technical skills and gained proficiency as a hand drummer, organizer and orchestrator, I made the philosophical discovery which cuts to the heart of my endeavors. The discovery that artists can change lives. I had always been told I was changing lives, but at some deep level I thought it was simply a cliché until I witnessed the transformation of my students take place before my very eyes. Through my project, I have given voice and place, not only to myself, but to the many troubled students who pass in and out of my charge.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTIONS:

Abstract i

Table of Contents ii

Chapters

I. A Background Leading up to the African Ensemble 1

II. The High School Experience 13

III. How This Process has Changed Me as an Artist 36

Appendix

Big Sky African Ensemble Curriculum 39

References 47

Background Leading Up to the African Ensemble

It all began in 2001 when I was hired as the new orchestra director at Rattlesnake Middle School. I went through all of the paces and jumped through the proper hoops required to land a job in the hard-to-break-into-world of Missoula County Public Schools. I fully understood the scope of my responsibilities regarding the orchestral portion of the position. I was expected to teach to the national standards and adhere to a busy performance schedule while creating a fun and exciting classroom environment. The mystery to me was an additional class called *general music*.

I thought I was prepared to teach anything they could throw at me. I sailed through General Music Methods in college. I understood all of the concepts and had a great student-teaching experience where I actually had to jump in teaching and come up with a year's worth of curriculum the first week. I knew I would be an instant success. Nothing could have been farther from the truth.

In the first few weeks of my tenure, the job seemed rather easy. I had five periods of orchestra and one period of general music. I picked the charts and wrote the warm-ups. We began preparing for our first concert and it was business as usual for the orchestra kids. They played when I said "play" and stopped when I said "stop." I didn't have many discipline problems and when they did occur, the kids seemed truly sorry and sincerely tried to change their behavior. In my general music class, the climate was quite different.

The general music children were belligerent and aloof. There were obvious cliques. The majority of the children qualified for the Title One Program which meant parental support was scarce at best. It was very intimidating to say the least. I had

spent the previous year teaching at a private school where nearly everyone enjoyed learning and poor behavior was the exception, not the rule. I was ill-prepared for the cynical egocentric teenagers I encountered in the public school setting.

I set about teaching the curriculum that was in place. We were operating on the trimester system and the course was designed to begin with *African Drumming*, move to *Piano in Class* and then finish the year with *Guitar in Class*. My school was equipped with 15 tubano drums and one djembe. The tubanos are a cross between a djembe and a conga type drum. They are a durable drum with a tuneable head. The drums are somewhat limited tonally in that while they can readily produce bass and open tones, the slap tone is difficult to be made to speak. I began to teach these drums using the *Will Schmid* method which is based on the Ewe tradition of West African drumming. The materials were written out in the western classical tradition of musical notation.

At first I enjoyed the ease of using the Will Schmid book and video. The first couple of ensemble pieces were easy enough for my beginning drummers and only in four parts. Soon however, the children began to grow bored with the pieces and became very disruptive. They complained the parts were too easy. I thought the obvious solution was to move onto the next piece in the book. After many unsuccessful classes, I found that the book progressed too rapidly for the students abilities. The material in the beginning was too easy and became considerably more difficult midway through the book. I began looking for a new method book and some instruction in the art of djembe ensemble.

The answer came from one of my former professors, Dorothy Morrison, who was the local Djembe fola or master drummer. Dorothy spoke of a Malenke drummer

named, Mamady Keita and his book, A Life for the Djembe. She had studied with Mamady and shared a couple of pieces with me which she taught me by rote. Being a proper classically trained western musician just out of music school, I began to dictate the rhythms as she played them. At the end of her session, she mentioned to me that the Manlenke people practice an oral tradition and in their native Africa no one would ever write the rhythms down, but would instead commit them to memory.

My western habit was then excused when she told me of Mamady's desire to share his music with other cultures so it was permissible to write the music out. I eagerly took the new music home and began working out a lesson plan.

The next day at school, we started with my newfound wealth of music. I began to teach by rote and immediately noticed a change in classroom participation. Students were engaged and learning. Classroom management issues decreased, then student and teacher satisfaction increased. I was so pleased that I shared the music with a colleague who is an established orchestra and general music instructor in our district. He is a talented musician and teacher. He quickly learned the pieces and enjoyed playing them but was concerned with the rote teaching method. As an instrumental music teacher, he takes great pride in teaching musical literacy in every ensemble. I had to agree, but was at loss as to the method of teaching general music students to become literate without becoming disruptive and out of control.

He shared his book of rhythmic exercises with me. His book simply titled, Rhythm Studies, takes the student through a sequential study of rhythmic notation including tests and ensemble pieces. The students loved playing the pages top to bottom without stopping. They became quite good reading at ever increasing tempos. I

combined the note reading with the rote ensemble work and had marginal success as I honed my classroom management skills. I found the students began to tire of African drumming after a trimester and were ready to switch to the next unit: *Piano in Class*.

I shelved the drums and set up the piano lab hoping to build upon the success the students had achieved in building a strong rhythmic foundation. The success was to be short lived. I knew the students would quickly begin to tire of the rigors of keyboard study. While many were kinesthetic learners, they lacked coordination and training which would enable them to master the use of both sides of their body to control the right and left hands independently. Some students longed for the drums where they could achieve some degree of right hand / left hand independence, but most begged to move onto guitars. The curriculum dictated a switch of instruments at the end of the trimester and we were only in the beginning of the second sequence.

Another problem with Piano in Class was the room itself. I had to setup and tear down twenty- five electronic pianos each day as well as wire them for sound. The setup and tear down was very time consuming and the instrument was difficult to play. The children became less and less focused and the class spiraled into chaos. I was exhausted from setting up and tearing down each day not to mention teaching the piano curriculum. I began to look for other options. The remaining instrument in the sequence was the guitar. I was reluctant to start the guitar because I still had most of the year left and was already on the third instrumental sequence. My reluctance gave way to necessity so I dove into the guitar unit with high hopes. I thought my chaotic class would soon be remedied. They had longed for the guitar from the start of the year and now the time was at hand.

I spent all of my prep period and half of my lunch tuning the instruments. I checked them out to each student and began to teach using my colleague's method book and CD called, Guitar in Class. At first the kids went along with the guitar method, but demanded I teach them rock songs. I agreed as long as they would do my lessons first. They did just that for a while but the short attention span, which seemed to rule my students scholastic lives, soon took over and chaos was the norm. They complained of sore fingers and the curriculum being too easy but when I tried to teach the harder rock songs, they had no fundamental skills and couldn't play them. The class spiraled into disruptive chaos and I was at my wits end as well as at the end of the curriculum. Frustrated, I turned back to the djembe. I began teaching a piece of music Professor Morrison gave me called Frekoba; it had something for everyone. The djembe rhythms were difficult enough for the advanced kids while the accompaniment parts were accessible to children with less training and ability. Frekoba would become a familiar piece I used for many ensembles and concerts in the future.

While I enjoyed moderate success with the general music class in each instrumental sequence, I experienced great success when the orchestra kids asked me if they could play the drums. These were my trained musicians who were able to learn all of the parts quite easily. We put together a performance piece within a few weeks and played them at our Spring Concert. The children loved it and the parents swooned. Soon I was inundated with parent requests to start an after-school ensemble which they could be a part of with their children! While the after-school ensemble never materialized, the experience opened my eyes to the possibilities of creating an African ensemble.

As the school year finally came to a close, I found I had learned a great deal and had a great deal to learn. I knew the African drums could be a successful part of my curriculum but I had serious classroom management issues to overcome before I could effectively bring students to a performance proficiency.

Over the next two years, I experimented with the three instrumental units: guitar, piano and drums with varying degrees of success. I learned my approach to the behavior problems in the general music class stemmed from my inconsistencies regarding discipline as well as the curriculum I had inherited. For the following school year, I vowed to be tougher on disruption and spend more time on drumming. I spent the Summer reading the works of educational theorists and looking for djembe ensemble lesson plans. I found libraries to be long on theorists but short on djembe lessons.

As the new year began, I tried to focus on the ensemble which was to be my real purpose, or the group I thought was my real purpose which was middle school orchestra. I tried to ignore the memories of general music class and swore to be a better teacher in the year to come, although I had no idea how this transformation was to take place. When the Summer ended and the new school year drew near, I began to feel terrified of the prospective General music students. All of the experiences I had learned from the previous year seemed insignificant and ineffective. I felt as though I would have to endure another year of General music rather than embrace teaching music, the subject I love. I was very excited about the orchestra and frightened to death by the concept of another year of disruptive and abusive General music kids. My fears were soon realized when the counselors brought me the list of children with

behavior problems and rejects who were to be kept apart in all the core classes but grouped together to experience the joy of music in *my* class.

As the year progressed, I had many experiences which were similar to the previous year. I was a tougher disciplinarian and as I went through the curriculum, I found it was becoming less difficult to lead class as well as less difficult to be effective in the tough General music environment. I stayed with the drumming unit longer and achieved marginal success. I still couldn't rehearse them to a performance level but there was light at the end of tunnel. I began to realize the African ensemble could be successful if I had the right kids but the culture of the school and the scheduling of the class by the counselors was still dysfunctional. I wondered what might happen if I tried to form an ensemble with older children, perhaps of high school age. My daydream ended when the school board began to talk of school closures.

Due to a declining enrollment and lack of funds, my school was identified as the target for closure. The process soon engulfed the whole school psyche and manifested itself in the lower functioning classes. The General music students, being mostly at risk kids, were simply not equipped to deal with this large of a cultural shift. The thought of their being bussed to another school terrified them. Their fears were those of all refugees: Acceptance, safety, class status and change of environment to name a few. They were the tough kids of Rattlesnake Middle School who were undefeated in the aggressive and physical sports of football, basketball and soccer. Many of these kids came from broken homes and were raising themselves. Closing their school meant stealing their identity and sending them out into the world yet again to fend for

themselves. The year was a loss. The classes were distracting and disruptive. The situation worsened when it came time to reassign the teaching staff.

Many beloved teachers were assigned elsewhere in the district further alienating the students they left behind. After many emotional board meetings and heated public comment, the school closure was scheduled. The children were devastated, as was most of the staff. Of the teachers who were reassigned, a few fell under the title of non-tenured. Tenure is granted after an employee completes three years of teaching. The teacher is then granted a fourth year tenured contract. I was a member of the unlucky group who was at the end of their third year. A new contract for me meant tenure and some degree of job security. For the non-tenured teachers, the reassignment process was vastly different. We had to wait until all of the tenured teachers were placed and then apply for the remaining positions. I began an interview process called, "The Arena" where you compete in rounds for the open positions. My progress was blocked at the end of each step by tenured teachers looking for movement within the system.

By the end of the school year it looked like my teaching career was coming to an end as I had not been successful in any of my interviews. It seemed there was always a more experienced teacher competing for the position I was seeking, and the music supervisor who did the hiring put little faith in my idealistic views and enthusiastic philosophies. At the end of the year, I packed my bags and bid farewell to teaching or so I thought. One week after the end of the school year, the teacher with the toughest assignment in the district finally cracked and found employment in a neighboring district. I was offered an .80 FTE position teaching four middle school General music sections. The upside of this position meant gaining tenure and some job security; the

downside was probable career suicide. Every teacher who held this position resigned within two years and most left before the end of the first year; I was terrified.

I was so disenchanted by the unsuccessful interview process I went through, the closing of my school and my last minute hiring, that I didn't create lesson plans for the upcoming year. I knew I would have to be a tough disciplinarian and would receive little administrative encouragement or support. I knew the students would be unrelenting. I spent the last days of Summer in the mountains with my son. I was emotionally preparing myself as if I was going into a war zone.

My assumptions were soon realized when I received my class lists at the start of the year. My class would best function with ten to twelve at risk kids; I received thirty. The climate in the three schools I traveled to was that of confusion and mistrust. Boundaries had been redrawn. Parents and students were contemptuous and disheartened. I set forth about the business of teaching with an uncertain future in mind. While the dust of a community-wide upheaval settled, I began teaching what was later to become one of the most successful and rewarding units in my General music experience, the African ensemble.

At first the students were relatively respectful and cooperative. They took to the business of djembe study with tentative optimism. As the trimester progressed, their attitudes began to change. I feared the class would slip into dysfunction so I stepped up my behavior expectations. We had behavior contracts and parent meetings. We made a desperate attempt at a performance ensemble, but each school I worked at seemed to mirror the last. The children lacked motivation and basic skills. I went into high gear and relentlessly rehearsed. If a child became disruptive I sent him out and

continued without missing a beat. I would start the class with a call and response sequence where I would play a rhythm and the children would echo it back. This served as a warm up and taught them to listen to a single voice and then respond musically. I then had them improvise short sections of one or two measures preparing them unwittingly for a solo later.

Next I would incorporate my colleague's Rhythm Studies book and teach them to read notation. Each line was a new exercise. They loved combining the lines and playing the whole page top to bottom without stopping. Despite the nearly constant complaining and begging to stop, they were actually learning to play together. They found safety in the structure of the printed music. It gave a boost to their self-esteem finally being able to read music like the band and orchestra kids. While the rhythmic exercises were functional and fun, they were too dull for a performance. We had to make the move from the confines of the printed page with all of its structure to the fear and freedom of playing by ear. I began to teach an ensemble piece by rote.

The first piece I chose was Frekoba, the piece Professor Morrison shared with me. In the beginning the children had great difficulty learning the rhythms. I had to modify them to make each rhythm easier to learn. Once the student had the rhythm under his hands, I began to make the part more difficult. I continued along this path of instruction for a couple of months using call and response to warmup. Then I would move into note reading with the rhythm sheets and finish with ensemble practice. Finally one of my groups showed enough promise to offer them a concert.

When I announced my intentions to the class their response was mixed. Some wanted to perform very badly while others were indifferent. I added the possibility of a

tour and pizza. Their response was overwhelmingly clear, “What do we have to do to get there?” These children had all but given up on public performance. Most had been removed from performing ensembles for behavior reasons. The others had so much performance anxiety they froze up at the thought. Their typical response to outside “stressors” was disruptive behavior. This presented me with a dual problem. How to teach proper ensemble behavior, while rehearsing non-musicians for an intricate musical performance.

As the concert approached I had to step-up the rehearsal pace and at the same time I had to intensify my behavior modifications. At first the challenge seemed insurmountable. The solution was just hard work. We worked through the nerves and the overtly disruptive behavior. We fell back on the comfort of the rehearsal routine, grudgingly ignoring impulsive outbursts and locker room language. As the day approached, the class began to notice how far they had come they began to take pride in their accomplishment. I was laying the ground work for what was to become my final creative project.

When the concert day finally arrived, they performed the first show in front of the student body at their home school. They were nervous and obviously out of their comfort zone. The performance echoed their mental state with shaky solos and tentative entrances; yet they finished and received a standing ovation. Their classmates couldn’t believe they pulled it off. These were the trouble makers who rarely finished anything related to school. How was it possible they could perform obviously difficult music in front of such a large crowd? At the end, the principal, who had been fighting their poor behavior all year, was astonished. We went on tour the rest of the day with a

sense of empowerment and confidence. When we performed at their grade schools, their former teachers were equally as astonished and showered them with compliments and support. At the restaurant, their behavior as impeccable. They acted as if they had been given a gift reserved for others, who were in their minds, more deserving. That day, they were the good kids, they were the stars. In reality, these were the tough kids, the trouble makers performing in a concert and at a high level of achievement. The whole experience was eye opening. I had found a way to reach the troubled students in my charge and to have a functionally successful program I could be proud of.

As the year drew to a close, I took stock of the lessons I had learned and wondered what the next year might bring. Little did I know it was to be equally as full of heartbreak and triumph. I simply knew I was onto something.

The next year I ran into the same types of problems with the scheduling of the class being the most important. The counselors had given me all of the troubled children again and yet, I found these students to be highly motivated and eager to work for the first trimester. Soon after, though their excitement waned and their behavior began to parallel the trend, I was to receive a partial solution for my dysfunctional classes when the middle school calendar was changed from trimesters to quarters and semesters. I petitioned to split the larger class of thirty children into a more manageable group of fifteen. I would then rotate the classes to include the next group of kids at the semesters end. Then I would have the students for only one semester avoiding student and teacher burnout and opening up room for another exploratory class in middle school. Only one school adopted the idea and to date, they have achieved the most success.

The High School Experience

With these wildly varying teaching experiences behind me in the Spring of 2005, in addition to my middle school General music position, I was offered the position of orchestra director at Big Sky High School. I was to be in charge of one high school orchestra and a class called *Exploring Music*. The orchestra part was second nature and a logical progression from the middle school post I formerly held; but this new exploring music class was sort of a mystery. I met with the former teachers' whose programs had grown making room for my employment. The orchestra position was straightforward and successful. The Exploring Music class was a sort of catchall for students needing to fill their Fine Arts Perspective. It all seemed quite familiar. The orchestra program was functional and intact while the Exploring Music class was to have the leftover students, who washed out of or lost interest in the traditional musical ensembles.

The curriculum in place was a lecture format where I would deliver information to students and they would answer back in the form of essays and reports. My colleague warned me of the lack of interest and behavior problems she had encountered. She wondered if there was an alternative curriculum I could adopt which would be more appealing to the students, but still fulfill the departmental commitment to teach to the national standards. I told her about my success with African drumming and djembe ensembles and she urged me to move forward with the idea.

The year drew to a close and I began brainstorming an alternative curriculum. I needed to design a class that was fulfilling to teach and fun for students. The music

staff at Big Sky seemed to be focused on the academic justification of their classes. To sustain administrative support and keep enrollment high, the staff felt all music classes should include more written work and testing. This would make my course be considered as valuable as the core education classes. My new curriculum would have to satisfy the staff's need for written academic study justifying the music program as a viable academic study, while engaging untrained music students in daily ensemble work and hands on music instruction.

In the Summer, I sought to further my education by enrolling in graduate school. I began course work in the Creative Pulse Program. My first year culminated with the requirement of producing a field project to be completed the following school year. I wanted the focus of my field project to directly relate to my work at Big Sky High School. I knew almost immediately I should choose to explore an African ensemble at the high school level. After my proposal was approved by the Creative Pulse faculty, I set about the task of achieving my goal. I knew what I was going to teach. I knew it could be successful but I didn't know how I would come up with the instruments. I went to the music supervisor and asked if he could help. He suggested I do some research as to the cost of a set of djembes and take my proposal to the principal at Big Sky. He also reminded me that the school owned 45 tubano style drums for the three middle schools in the district. Perhaps I could borrow a set to get started. I told him of my plans to order all djembe drums. He asked me why I didn't want to order a tubano drum set consisting of only one djembe and 14 tubanos. My experience with the tubanos led me to the conclusion that they were an inferior drum to the djembe and unable to produce the many sounds required for the ensemble pieces supplied to me by Professor

Morrison. The tubanos were only capable of an open tone and a bass tone; however, the djembes could easily produce the three beginning tones required, the open tone, the bass tone and the coveted slap tone. I don't think I convinced him, but I was purchasing the drums for the high school.

The major set back in borrowing the middle school drums was in regard to the General music curriculum. The middle school plans were set to teach the drum unit beginning the first week of school. There was no way I could use the middle school drum set to start my high school group. I pondered the dilemma and decided to send a proposal to my new principal at Big Sky. I told him of the success I had experienced with previous groups, and how using the djembe drums would allow me to teach to the national standards while satisfying my own personal and professional goals. He promptly dismissed the idea, stating he had just purchased 10 guitars for the class I was taking over. I left the meeting feeling dejected and overwhelmed. My field project had been submitted and approved by the graduate school and I didn't even have enough drums to start the year.

With tenacity, I went back to the music supervisor and reminded him of the funds I had raised at Rattlesnake Middle School with my students. There was \$1,500.00 in the bank when the school board closed my school. The music supervisor reluctantly agreed to let me put the money towards the new drums. I went back to the high school principal with my new offer. In the interim, the bids had come in that I requested on the new djembes. I went into the principal's office armed with an estimate of the total cost of the instruments and a check for approximately half of the amount. He was delighted to see I had raised part of the money, but not yet sold on the idea. So I began to

convince him of my proposal. After about an hour of discussion he gave me the go ahead to start the process.

I left his office with great relief and a sense of pride in the accomplishment. I went about the business of ordering the drums and reveled in my projects sudden leap forward, but found my excitement was to be short lived when I learned my drum order was to be delayed due to a production cycle at the factory. They sent me five drums and an IOU which left me critically short of instruments for my upcoming class.

Once again I had to improvise. My thoughts went out to a colleague who was having difficulty with her general music class last year. She is a traditional orchestra teacher who was forced to teach a General music ensemble. The poor behavior of the students was especially difficult for her to endure. She is accustomed to string players who are trained at an early age in the art of ensemble rehearsal and behavior. I knew the African drums were on the edge of her comfort zone, so I suggested that I might set up the piano lab for her and she could ease into the year with a familiar tool. She loved the idea. I made her transition easier and procured the instruments I needed to begin my high school ensemble. I was in business! I moved the drums to the high school and set up for my first class.

I began with the well-tested curriculum I used in middle school. We played the rhythm charts and used a Mamady Keita piece for performance. The students loved it. They were able to learn more quickly than the middle school students and were better behaved. They enjoyed playing together in an ensemble and some even brought their parents in to play. I set about preparing for a performance. I didn't know when it would be or where, but I knew we had to perform. At first the kids were apprehensive but soon

most were open to the idea. When they signed up for “Exploring Music,” a title for the class which I inherited, the counselors told them they would not have to perform. I later found out that by advertising the non-performance aspect of the class, I could cap enrollment at 30 students. Performance classes have no limit for enrollment.

As the class progressed, it was the students who asked when they could give a concert. I tried to schedule one, but found it to be very difficult since high school schedules are very inflexible; I had not been there the previous year when the traditional scheduling took place. Finally, the principal agreed to a concert date. We were to perform for the school-wide assembly in front of 1,500 kids. I asked my group who had signed up for a non-performance music class if they wanted to perform. I was relieved to find that most of the class wanted to perform. I intensified the rehearsal schedule and worked out a show. We would play the piece, bringing in all of the parts together and then showcase each section with a soli groove. We would then feature soloists and end with some tight breaks. The kids were rehearsed to near perfection. The time grew closer. We were set to play the day before Christmas break.

The weekend before the concert was normal Montana weather with snow turning to rain and then freezing. The night before the concert, the weather man predicted freezing rain and for once his prediction was correct. The school was closed and our concert cancelled. The students left for Christmas break with a mixture of sadness and relief. They had worked hard and their performance was taken away from them at the last minute. We ended the semester with a film session I presented for my Creative Pulse field project. We performed on the stage and filmed the show as if we were actually giving a concert.

Overall the students were quite satisfied with the class. Several students re-enrolled for the next semester. The counselors were pleased to inform me the enrollment for the next semester had doubled. This was good news; for as I taught the drumming, I saw an opportunity to escape my middle school assignment and become closer to full time as a high school teacher. If I could increase enrollment enough to justify two classes, I would be able to decrease my middle school class load by one class; which would be a step in the right direction! As I anticipated my next semester of students, I knew I would have to give the middle school drums back and the drum maker had yet to give me a reliable time line for the djembes I had ordered.

The next semester came and much like the previous one, the students loved it. I had few behavior problems and was able to prepare enough material for a long performance. I proposed the idea of a tour to the class, and like before, a few loved the idea while others were unsure. We spent the mornings drumming nevertheless. Kids would peek in the door and teachers would stop me in the hall. It seemed that all of this drumming was creating quite a buzz! I began to realize the class was ready to perform but ran into the same scheduling trouble as before. In the Spring, the high school calendar was even more packed with events. I tried to organize a tour offsite but ran into scheduling road blocks there also. It seemed my class would never perform.

I began to invite individual classes into our rehearsal space. This would give the kids an audience in a safe place and satisfy their desire to perform without disrupting the whole school. My students responded very well to this practice. They took comfort in the performance being in our room and the visiting teachers showered them with

compliments. Even if we couldn't put an actual concert performance together, the class was satisfied for the most part.

Around this time, the Fine Arts Department was charged with updating the curriculum. We met in teams according to our specialty. Each group was to go over the old curriculum bringing fresh ideas and practices to the table. There was concerted effort to integrate American Indian studies. Recently funds had been appropriated to bring Indian education for all students to our schools. During the long meetings when I was waiting for my area to be addressed, I began to rewrite my curriculum to create an African Drum Ensemble at the high school level. My colleague suggested I provide it to the principal at Big Sky to see if it would generate some interest in the administration to add a second class in the future.

In our writing of the Fine Arts Curriculum document, the Fine Arts Supervisor encouraged us to be idealistic. He wanted us not only to incorporate what we now teach but to include ideas that could be implemented in future settings given the possibility of budget increases for adding a teacher or buying more equipment. To this end I began to write my curriculum. Like the Fine Arts document, I based mine on the National Standards of Education. I was amazed at how the African drum ensemble concept fit right into the standards.

Standard One:

Students will sing alone and with others a varied repertoire or music I drew from the rich African tradition of song where many pieces exist.

Standard Two:

Students will perform on instruments, alone or with others is at the core of my curriculum.

Standard Three:

Students will improvise melodies, variations and accompaniment. I planned for the use of Orff instruments to play African melodies which are traditionally sung or played on barred instruments. I have incorporated the Orff instruments at the middle school level.

Standard Four:

Students will compose and arrange music within specific guidelines. I used my colleague's Rhythm Studies text and had the students create short rhythmic compositions which we played in class.

Standard Five:

Students will read and notate music was covered in much the same way beginning with work in Rhythm Studies and then creating djembe compositions to perform in class.

Standard Six:

Students will listen to, analyze and describe music I teach an intro to jazz history and specifically how it relates to African drumming. Students listen to examples of music both Jazz and African and then give oral and written responses.

Standard Seven:

Students will evaluate music and music performance is a written and oral evaluation of a drum performance by the class or a professional drum ensemble.

Standard Eight:

Students will understand relationships between music, the other arts and disciplines outside the arts. Here a dance and drum concert would be an excellent experience. I later collaborated with the drama/dance instructor putting on a dance and drum concert with students not only performing music and dance but setting lights and stage props, creating sets, seating concert goers and even serving desserts at the performance.

Standard Nine:

Students will understand music in relationship to history, culture, life and work. Here I exposed students to a variety of African musical styles to develop an awareness and appreciation of African music and culture. In collaboration with the drama/ dance department students would become aware of career opportunities available to musicians and technicians in the music industry.

The curriculum document I adapted is a work in progress. In bending to political pressure from my supervisor and a Fine Arts colleague with regard to my classes increased enrollment, I recently had to add a stronger jazz history component to the course. It seems other classes were experiencing a decrease in enrollment due in part

to the popularity of my class. Subsequently, my course was to be scrutinized with regard to it's academic content. I cheerfully pressed forward and continued my project ever contemplating the reality of teaching in one building.

As the Spring semester drew to a close, I eagerly awaited the presentation of my field project to the students and faculty of the Creative Pulse. I had the DVD recording of my first semester class and the curriculum document I had developed out of the General music curriculum we created in the Spring. Looking back, I had covered much ground. I had overcome the seemingly insurmountable obstacles of selling my idea to the administration at Big Sky and obtaining the equipment to actually run the class. I had endured the political consequences of actually changing the curriculum of an existing course in a financially strapped music department. It seemed the money I had received from the administration was jealously coveted by my colleagues in the music department who had been unsuccessfully appealing to the administration for funds for quite some time.

As I worked through the Creative Pulse, I didn't know exactly what my final creative project was going to be but I knew it would include dance and drums. I began planning and collaborating at once. The answer came when Professor Morrison asked me if I would prepare a concert with my high school group to perform at the Annual Music Teachers Convention in the fall. I had contacted students and would use a piece we learned last Spring. It would include a performance with a middle school drum group and professor Morrison's professional African ensemble. It was going to be a wonderful performance. I would showcase my students and partially fulfill my degree requirements in one concert. At the beginning of the year, I started rehearsing at a

fevered pace right up to the day I received the call that my performance was cancelled and in my place was to be a motivational speaker! My colleagues all spoke up in my behalf, but the presenter was already contracted and I was out of luck: another concert canceled.

Around this time, I was contacted by the drama/dance teacher at Big Sky, Sarah DeGrandpre. Sarah couldn't help hearing about my drum class (she was in the next room) and she wanted to talk about the possibility of collaborating for a dance and drum performance. Her timing was impeccable. She listened to the story of my cancelled performance and we began to brainstorm for our new concert. We used the idea of dance and drum that Professor Morrison introduced me to and created a performance of the piece Frekoba. Professor Morrison suggested I contact an African dance instructor named Karen Oberg. She taught at Creative Pulse the previous Summer. Karen was very excited to come and teach; the students loved her. As she worked with Sarah and her dancers, the drum group worked separately. After Karen taught the dance steps to the class she asked me if I had a recording. I was very excited to make one for her and the CD turned out great. Creating the recording was a good learning experience for my drum ensemble as well. They had to start and stop at the right places and play the steady groove that was required for dancing. It was difficult but I feel the process took the group to a whole new level.

As the dancers prepared their portion, I worked to include solo sections into the piece. I didn't know where they would fit in with regards to the dance portion but I wanted to make sure we would have an interesting piece that would stand alone in case the dancers cancelled. I began experimenting with the arrangement of the piece. I

focused on orchestrating the piece in such a way as to allow for a stand alone performance, so the arrangement would be stripped down to allow for the showcase of a dance troupe.

I had to change instrumentation for the piece since the djembe ensembles I had studied with Professor Morrison were smaller and better equipped. Up to this time I would simply distribute the accompaniment parts in the pieces I taught to other djembes.

The African ensembles Professor Morrison had introduced me to had authentic dunnun drums, which are large wooden drums with cow skin heads, which act as a sort of rhythm section for the group. They come in three sizes with Dununba as the largest and lowest one. Sangban as the middle drum and Kenkeni as the smallest and highest pitched drum. These drums are set on stands or placed on the ground and struck with a wooden mallet. Each drum is accompanied by an African bell, which is similar to an American cow bell and played by the same drummer simultaneously. The dunnun drums are used in concert with the djembes to form the wide tonal range of the percussive African orchestra.

With the slight resources of my school budget stretched to the limit, I would have to improvise with regard to instrumentation. I needed to replicate the authentic sound of dunnun drums. I began to look at each of the schools I worked at for make-shift dunun drums. I remembered many retired marching snare drums which adorned the rehearsal space in the Jefferson Fine Arts Building where my All City Orchestra met. The drums had not been used for many years and were tuneable, so I could create the necessary low medium and high pitches. They were deep old wooden drums with a

mature tone. I asked the band director if I might borrow them and he insisted I just take them. I ended up with fifteen drums in all and was able to create ten useable drums out of the parts of the fifteen.

Now, I could fairly and accurately reproduce the sound of an African Drum Ensemble. I went back to work on the arrangement of the concert piece. I had enough students to assign more than one person to a drum part. I did this to enhance the sound of the group as well as to insure enough performers to cover all of the parts at the concert. The individual parts of the piece were created for the different voices of the ensemble; dunumba, kenkenui, sangban and two djembe parts. I had to keep the piece structured with definable sections so I could make cuts for the dancers without destroying the rhythmic African feel of the piece. I knew I wanted to showcase each part of the group with a soli section where a group of drummers assigned to a specific part could be heard sounding alone. I would then bring in the whole group for a blended sound. I left room in the arrangement to add individual djembe solos in the center portion.

I wanted to begin the piece with a traditional drum call where I would play a specific rhythm and the ensemble would play a response. I also used this call to cue a change of section like the beginning or the end of a solo, as it traditional in African drumming. I ended up cuing the dancers in this way as well. After the solos, I set up a section where the players could create sense of groove. I did this in the very beginning as well. I ended the piece with a drum call and response leading to a drum break.

After much rehearsal and with the performance date looming, we set up a few combined rehearsals with the dance troupe. All of the drummers filed on to the stage

with the apprehensive dancers in the wings. Sarah asked if we would play what we had rehearsed. We found our places and performed our piece. After a few minutes it was clear my arrangement was way too cluttered for the dancers. I had too many changes and not enough groove section. I had to think quickly as we had pulled students out of several classes for our combined rehearsal and time was running short. The dancers had choreographed sections which changed at regular intervals so I moved the solo sections to the end of the performance and used the drum call to cue the dancers step changes. It worked beautifully. With the help of Sarah, the dancers intuition and instant training, we had them changing step when I gave the signal. We set up a cue to bring them on and off stage and their part of the performance was ready.

The drummers seemed to have little difficulty playing the groove parts for the dancers. It was the drum call that was giving them a hard time. They had been trained to start and stop as well as change to the solo sections by listening for the drum call and they found it quite a challenge to re-learn. We practiced nonstop for the remainder of the period and by the end, it all seemed to fall into place. Once we had the new form down, I put the solos back into the piece. I ran each solo section in succession and ended the piece with the break. I sent the kids back to their classes and tore down my gear anticipating the performance. I felt confident of the groups' ability. Their attitudes were great. It seemed they all were excited and eager to perform. My only concern was my apprehension of how many members of my group would be in attendance, with the performance in the evening. At my other concerts, I could count on all of the orchestra kids; but this was the first time I had scheduled an evening General music

performance at the middle school or high school level. It was too late to worry, I just had to trust they would come. I did some last minute lighting changes and went home.

That evening I arrived in usual fashion around two hours early. I set the drums in place and met with the other director to go over her last minute changes. After our conversation, I went to wait for my kids in our classroom. I was pleasantly surprised to find all of them waiting for me at the door! They were nervous but excited. Most hadn't been in a musical performance since middle school. We went over our cues, had a pep talk and took our places back stage. When the curtain rolled back, I played the intro call and we were off. The dancers entered and performed flawlessly. The drummers held a steady groove until it was their turn to shine and shine they did. They were awesome! I played the drum call signaling the end and our portion of the show concluded. The kids were ecstatic. They achieved something they had long ago written off. These former band, orchestra and choir kids never thought they would be given another chance to perform. The majority had been removed from or quit their performance ensembles in middle school. They were grateful to me for believing in them and following through with the concert. They left that night with a sense of pride and accomplishment.

In the halls the next day I was complimented many times by staff members who attended the concert for taking these students to a new level of achievement. Many of my performers were "at risk" students in danger of becoming high school dropouts. Their teachers were excited that these students had a new found desire to come to school. The principal even asked if we could perform in another show just before the Christmas break. The Christmas Assembly Concert was to be held in front of the entire

student body of fifteen hundred. We would perform with the orchestra, choir and the jazz band. This new performance opportunity left me with the challenge of deciding what piece to program.

In preparing for our dance performance, I had taught the group a second piece which was more complex and too difficult to bring to a performance level. I thought of using this new piece which was titled Six Eight Jam for the next show. I then went to Sarah and asked if her dancers would be able to perform at the Christmas Assembly. After a long conversation and much deliberation, Sarah decided it would be unrealistic to schedule her dancers for performance at the Christmas Assembly. I knew I would have to prepare a piece which would stand alone for our portion of the show. We went back into the rehearsal room and focused on the two pieces we had been working on, Six Eight Jam and Frekoba. As the students perfected the pieces, it became clear they would rather perform Frekoba. I agreed to their request, but wanted to add something to the piece. They were quite good at starting, stopping and the solo sections, so we began to work a new individual solo section. This time I would feature three soloists in a *call and response jam* in the middle of the piece. Each player would improvise four or eight measures, then I would visually cue the next player to come in. The solo section would require a solo background groove to accompany the soloists, but not overpower them. It was quite a challenge for the students to play with the intense energy required but at a lower volume, so the solos could be heard. As in the previous concert, I gave the students a choice regarding their participation in the concert performance.

Some of my students who were also enrolled in Sarah's drama/dance class asked if there would be technical positions available for the show. As it stood there was

not a great need for any technical help, but the students suggested we jazz up the show with a few special effects. I agreed to hear them out and I was surprised by their ideas which ranged from a spotlight and fog machine to black lights and full costume! I told them I would give them an answer after I met with the band director and worked out a stage plot. We met and came to the conclusion that the orchestra, choir and African ensemble would set up on the east end of the gym and the jazz band would set up on the west. I would need to provide sound reinforcement and lighting for the orchestra and choir. I incorporated the African ensemble on the east side in front of my other group with the choir on risers in the back. This setup enabled me to use the stage lights for orchestra, choir and African ensemble.

When my class met the next day I told my students of the plan and they were very excited. They said they would feel like rock stars under the lights and in front of that many people. The only thing missing would be man-made fog. One student asked to leave the room and then quickly returned with a fog machine she had borrowed from Sarah in the drama room. She took responsibility for the operation of the machine. I hired a sound technician/recording engineer to run the PA system and assigned a couple of students to help him. Also I had a student operate the camera and film the whole thing.

The day of the show was hectic but things seemed to go off without a hitch. The orchestra played beautifully. The choir sang sweet renditions of popular Christmas songs. The jazz band was well rehearsed and performed flawlessly, except for a blown circuit breaker dimming their lights. When it was time for the African ensemble I was well into the performance mode and I had very little performance anxiety. I started our

piece with a high level of energy that carried through the whole ensemble. The lighting added a strange effect and as our groove settled in the short blasts of the fog machine created a surreal ambiance. We flowed into the newly added solo section with grace and precision. The drummers were all in the groove and making great music. When I sounded the call bringing the piece to an end, the crowd of fifteen hundred rose to their feet cheering. The concert was a success. I had proven to myself and to my colleagues that I could bring students with little or no prior musical training to a performance level in just one semester.

After the concert and Christmas break, I began planning the next semesters events. I wanted to create another section of African drumming to accompany a dance class which would be offered at the same time. I met with Sarah and we formulated a plan to take to the administration. It was around this time that I was called into the music supervisor's office regarding the African ensemble curriculum I had created and implemented the previous year and a half. It seemed the administration had received complaints from the art department that my class was taking students away from the art classes. I knew this was true because of overflowing enrollment each semester. I learned the art teacher had also complained that the reason for my increasing enrollment was that the students felt African ensemble was an "easy A". I was asked to defend my curriculum and explain my methods to the music supervisor. I held that I was teaching a performance class and my two concerts were a testament to the hard work of my students. I went on to name several staff members who were appreciative of my efforts in motivating troubled teens to a level where they could participate in a public performance. I explained my method of teaching using written rhythm charts and then

rote ensemble techniques. I mentioned the daily improvisation as well as written student compositions. After a lengthy meeting I decided that my class should not focus on performance. Instead I should fall back on the previous curriculum and offer more of an exploring music curriculum where students experience a broad range of study.

I left the meeting with a dejected feeling as though I was betrayed. I expected praise for creating a fun class where student affirmation and achievement were valued and promoted. I had hoped to add a dance/drum section and further expand my efforts while creating more FTE for the arts department. In reality, I was expected to move in the opposite direction with more lecture and written assessment. I knew with my student demographic and from experience in teaching the lecture and writing format, it was a course that would be difficult to teach. I was posed with yet another challenge; I needed to satisfy the administrations request for more lecture and testing while creating a class which would be rewarding and interesting to teach.

I met with the music department at Big Sky and told them of my plight. The choir director, Nancy Labbe was the previous instructor of the class and thought I was doing a great job. The band instructor, Leon Slater held much the same views as the music supervisor but perhaps for slightly different reasons. It seemrf when I was hired at Big Sky, I was unwittingly in competition with the band director for some of the schools discretionary funds. My winning and a total change of curriculum had put me at a disadvantage politically in the Big Sky Music Department. I explained that teaching traditional western music history would be a huge mistake and while I was fascinated by the truths and accounts of the great composers, the average high school student was not.

In bowing to administrative and political pressures, I began to brainstorm and really study, adding a written component to my class. I wanted it to be interesting and fun while satisfying the administrations academic requirements. I toyed with the idea of teaching strange and quirky music history where I could focus on the sordid and bizarre behavior of famous western classical musicians. I experimented with the topic in lecture for a few classes having students research composers and bring their findings to the class. While they found the topic interesting for a while, the class seemed to tire quickly of the subject. The result was disruptive student behavior. They constantly asked if they could return to drumming.

I began to research adding a Jazz History component to the class. I knew there would be correlations between jazz and African music. One manifestation of these correlations could be found in an African piece I studied in Creative Pulse and introduced my class: a piece called, Yankady which was based on a rhythmic pattern known in popular blues music as a shuffle. Here was an example of an indigenous African rhythmic pattern which could also be found in modern blues and jazz music. The blues adaptation seemed to be directly borrowed from African djembe rhythms. I wondered how it came to be and what significance this transference had on American jazz music.

I began making comparisons between the jazz ensemble rhythm section and the African ensemble dunnun drums. In a jazz ensemble, piano, bass and drums create the rhythm section. The piano provides the harmonic structure and enhances the rhythmic figures. The bass provides a rhythmic foundation and enhances the harmonic structures. The drum set provides a tireless groove largely based on African rhythms.

In the African djembe ensemble the harmony is primarily sung or played on barred instruments. Here the rhythmic structures are the dominant feature in the group with two separate parts, the bell and the drum being played together by the same drummer. Some of the correlations I began to notice were in the structure of the individual parts in the African compositions.

In the piece, Yankady, the strong rhythmic foundation is provided by the low sounding dununba drums which repeat a specific rhythmic pattern or ostinato. The interesting correlation with American jazz and blues music is the shuffle pattern found in the bell part of the dununba. The low dununba drummer with his two parts occupies a similar role as the jazz bands string bass part. The kenkeni drum adds a syncopated drum and bell part which is similar to comping with the left hand on a piano. The sangban also has a syncopated entrance and groove which can be found in the jazz band rhythm section as well as in the accompaniment parts of the jazz band horns. Each of the three drum parts, dununba, kenkeni and sangban can be reproduced or incorporated into the jazz bands drum set. The djembe parts are closely related to the jazz band lead horn lines. They are required to play a steady groove but have more freedom to open up and improvise.

I used Yankady as an exploration into the actual mechanics of my comparison of the two forms, traditional African ensemble and the American jazz band. I enabled students to kinesthetically experience the concepts I was trying to convey. To satisfy the administration's desire for a more formal written curriculum, I began to use the Thelonius Monk Institute of Jazz curriculum called, Jazz in America. This web site offers lesson plans and suggestions for jazz education including work sheets and

printed tests. I would create lectures from the site using information I deemed relevant to my discussions. I would also use jazz recordings as well as African ensemble recordings to enhance the curriculum.

When I first began, the challenge was to find the right amount of lecture time to incorporate into my lesson. Too much lecture and I would lose the groups attention as well as written and rote drumming time. Too little lecture and the students would tire and complain of hand fatigue from playing the djembes. Towards the end of the semester, I began to find a rhythm in my teaching, intuitively shaping each class be it more or less lecture based on the class climate of any given day. Many days during the lecture portion, the students would complain and call for more drumming causing me to be concerned as to their retention of the lecture material. But when I assessed their progress they performed well on the written tests. I continued along this path of lecture, written music reading using the rhythm charts and then rote ensemble rehearsal and class performance. The administration was satisfied by the structure and academic focus but all of the lecturing and testing took away from my ensemble music making. It will be difficult to teach an entire piece and bring it to performance. At this point in the class I have found in satisfying the critics, I will have to sacrifice the performance opportunities for the African ensemble. While having no performance event is the outcome desired by the music supervisor, the principal will inevitably request us to give a concert. This political dichotomy has been and will continue to be the source of much frustration for me.

The conflict lies in understanding the amount of rehearsal time required to bring a group of non-musicians to a performance proficiency. The music supervisor is against

performance for the political reason that less drumming equals more written study, justifying the class as legitimate and therefore a valuable music department offering. However, the principal sees the typically low-achieving-at-risk population of the class rise to the unexpected heights of a concert performance. To bring the group to concert readiness, I must spend at least eight to twelve weeks focusing exclusively on the performance piece. To the outsider visiting the class, it might seem that all the students are doing is hitting drums and having a good time. In reality, the students are gaining kinesthetic technical proficiency on the drums while becoming literate note readers and competent ensemble performers.

This sort of political pressure and curricular ignorance has become the final obstacle in my projects two-year life. I must find a way to strike a balance between the writing based curriculum desired by my music supervisor and the performance based model desired by my principal. While frustration and despair could easily cause me to fold and adopt a traditional music appreciation method, I am using this critique to mold a more perfect experience for the students. In trying to satisfy each administrator I am forced to creatively problem solve and design a learning experience where all stakeholders will be justified. I must modify my curriculum to contain a written component I find compelling to teach with relevant and intriguing listening examples. I plan to include timely written and aural assessments. I am creating a schedule that will allow time for students to gain music literacy and performance capabilities.

The last two years of trial and experimentation have shown me a clear path of recourse and rebuilding for the African ensemble. Once I create the blue print for the success of my class, the benefits will become obvious to administration. Discipline

issues will decrease while student achievement will rise. I will satisfy doubting colleagues with both a writing component and a concert performance. This reality will hasten my professional goal and encourage administration to offer more sections of the course, there by increasing my FTE at the high school level. The outcome of these events is yet to be discovered as mine is a work in progress.

How This Process Changed Me As An Artist.

When I began to teach at Rattlesnake Middle School, I was a new idealistic teacher viewing life and my career with innocent hope and unbridled optimism. I felt fully prepared to begin my professional career as a music educator and to embody the excellence in achievement of the ethical, cognitive and physical demands placed in front of me. As I took on the responsibility of teaching, my ideals began to erode along with my self-confidence. I questioned my training and my ability to design and sustain learning experiences and goals. Much of my frustration was centered around my one General music class. The daily failures left me feeling unprepared and ineffective. The at-risk children in my charge seemed to drain every ounce of spirit and energy from me. Nothing I tried worked with them. I knew I needed help both spiritually and professionally, but just out of college with the feeling of impending doom due to large student loans, I felt trapped.

I continued along this path justifying my professional failures as something that was out of my control or something that would go away in the course of due time and I chose to carry on. After my school closed, I said good by to my docile and caring string program and stepped into the full-time world of at-risk kids bringing drugs and knives to school. I came to know and teach children who were verbally and physically abusive towards me. Instead of administrative support, my classes filled to thirty or more lost souls who had more life experience than half of the staff I worked with. My school's closure also brought to me the prospect of a full load of general music classes each day. I knew I couldn't last long, unless I sought help in professional development.

I applied and was accepted to the Creative Pulse. I began studies in much more diverse areas of the arts than my musical training had taken me. Through personal performance, I began to address areas of conflict in my professional life. My forced career move to General music teaching was at the heart of these explorations. Building on my studies in The Creative Pulse, I began to develop coping strategies and skills which directly influenced my career. One such manifestation I gained during The Creative Pulse was the awakening of my artist self. As a musician I didn't think of myself as an artist. I knew that making music was making art, but I didn't fully understand the sense of place and self-discovery I would come to know by the end of my course work. The sense of place in discovering my artist self gave me a self-efficacy, which carried on into my teaching. Instead of running away from my seemingly insurmountable career killing assignment, I began to embrace my problem by designing my field project and ultimately my final creative project around this goal.

In creating the high school version of the African drumming course, I found myself being pulled in many directions. The staff and music department administration wanted me to teach a lecture course to just fill the time. I knew I wanted something more. It took the push of delivering a graded field project in Creative Pulse to set my dream on the track to reality. After completing the first year of The Creative Pulse resulting in the creation of my class, I became impassioned and more driven to succeed. When I decided to continue and see where the final creative project would take me, I had no idea how it would all end up. By giving the dance concert and then culminating with the all school assembly, I knew I was changing lives, mine included.

Changing Lives: *Artists Change Lives.*

How do I know I have grown as an artist and how has that growth manifested itself in my personal and professional life? I look to my students and see success where none was expected. I see joy, even if it's only for a little while, masked by streetwise toughness. I see in my students an admiration and respect that they never thought they were worthy to achieve. I hear it in their voices when they see me in the halls. I have given them something many musicians take for granted or have forgotten: the simple joy that performance brings. The self-satisfaction only dedication and hard work can bring. The self-respect that has been beaten down and hidden deep inside them. Through the Creative Pulse and my final creative project, I have made a difference in their lives, even if only for a while. Yet, through the African ensemble, I have given them the lasting experience of a job well done. They now feel satisfaction in knowing that they too are valuable members of society. I know this is a gift which can never be taken away.

Appendix

Big Sky African Ensemble Course Curriculum.

The African Ensemble Course will emphasize a hands-on approach to music making and study. Students will play and perform on djembe and dunun drums, bells, classroom instruments and a variety of shakers. Students will compose and improvise rhythmic music, observe musical performances, participate in selected school and community performances with guest artists and other ensembles and will be assessed through playing tests, oral and written exams, class participation and concert performances.

STANDARD #1 :

I. Students will sing alone and with others a varied repertoire of music.

Competency #1: Students will be able to sing a simple melodic line of no more than one octave.

1. Strategies:
 - a. Singing of traditional African melodies of selected repertoire.
 - b. Singing with classroom instrument accompaniment
 - c. Doubling or imitating instrumental lines.
 - d. Use of African songs and lyrics.
 - e. Employ teacher demonstration.
2. Resources:
 - a. Recordings.
 - b. Visuals.
 - c. Classroom instruments.
 - d. Method books.
 - e. World drums.
3. Community and school performances.
 - a. Guest artists.
 - b. Video materials.

4. Assessment
 - a. Class participation.
 - b. Concert performances.
 - c. Playing exams.
 - d. Oral and written exams.

STANDARD #2

II. Students will perform on instruments, alone and with others.

Competency #1 Students will be able to recognize and play various African rhythms.

Competency #2 Students will be able to visually identify and play African rhythms.

1. Strategies:
 - a. Demonstration and imitation.
 - b. Notation.
 - c. Repetition.
 - d. Elemental skill development resources.
 - e. Aural analysis.
 - f. Ensemble playing.
2. Resources:
 - a. Method books.
 - b. Classroom instruments.
 - c. Computer technology.
 - d. Recordings.
 - e. World drums.
 - f. Video materials.
 - g. Guest artists.
 - h. Classroom instruments.
3. Assessment:
 - a. Participation.
 - b. Concert performance.
 - c. Written assignments/exams/reports.
 - d. Playing tests.
 - e. Oral exams.

STANDARD #3

III. Students will improvise melodies, variations and accompaniment.

Competency #1 Students will improvise a melody over the 12-bar blues progression utilizing the blues scale.

1. Strategies:
 - a. Demonstration.
 - b. Imitation.
 - c. Elemental skill development.
 - d. Phrase/echo.
 - e. Question/answer.
 - f. Call/response.
2. Resources:
 - a. Method books.
 - b. Classroom instruments.
 - c. Unpitched percussion.
 - d. Recordings.
 - e. World Drums.
 - f. Video materials.
 - g. Guest artists.
 - h. Community/school performances.
3. Assessment:
 - a. Participation.
 - b. Concert performances.
 - c. Written assignments/exams/reports.
 - d. Playing tests.
 - e. Oral exams.
 - f. Performance of student works.

STANDARD #4

IV. Students will compose and arrange within specified guidelines.

Competency #1 Students will be introduced to basic rhythmic compositional techniques.

Competency #2 Students will compose and notate their basic compositions.

1. Strategies:
 - a. Demonstration.
 - b. Imitation.
 - c. Elemental skill development.
 - d. Phrase/echo.
 - e. Call/response.
 - f. Notation.
 - g. Repetition.
 - h. Aural analysis.

2. Resources:
 - a. Method books.
 - b. Classroom instruments.
 - c. Recordings.
 - d. World drums.
 - e. Video materials.
 - f. Music writing materials/programs.
 - g. Guest artists.
 - h. Community/school performances.

3. Assessment:
 - a. Participation.
 - b. Concert performances.
 - c. Written assignment/exams/reports.
 - d. Performance evaluations.
 - e. Playing tests.
 - f. Oral exams.
 - g. Performance of student works.

STANDARD #5

V. Students will read and notate music.

Competency #1: Students will demonstrate the ability to maintain a steady beat and demonstrate an understanding of meter signatures, irregular meters and mixed meter.

Competency #2 Students will recognize all basic notation, dotted figures and the corresponding rests and be able to play or sing alone or with others a multi measure line using that notation.

Competency #3 Students will demonstrate an understanding of the relationship of notes to each other in terms of subdivision, augmentation and diminution.

1. Strategies:
 - a. Listening.
 - b. Composition.
 - c. Playing/performing.
 - d. Demonstration.
 - e. Imitation.
 - f. Dictation.
 - g. Notation.
 - h. Repetition.
 - i. Aural analysis.

- 2 Resources:
 - a. World drums.
 - b. Unpitched percussion.
 - c. Recordings.
 - d. Video materials.
 - e. Music writing materials.
 - f. Worksheets.
 - g. Source readings.

3. Assessment:
 - a. Participation.
 - b. Concert performances.
 - c. Written assessments/exams/reports..
 - d. Playing tests.
 - e. Oral exams.

STANDARD #6

VI. Students will listen to, analyze and describe music.

Competency #1 Students will analyze the form of the music of the West African tradition.

Competency #2 Students will identify monophonic, homophonic and polyphonic rhythmic textures.

1. Strategies:
 - a. Demonstration and imitation.
 - b. Listening.
 - c. Composition.
 - d. Playing/performing.
 - e. Notation.

- f. Repetition/reinforcement.
 - g. Elemental skill development.
 - h. Concert attendance.
- 2. Resources:
 - a. World drums.
 - b. Computer technology.
 - c. Unpitched percussion.
 - d. Recordings.
 - e. Video materials.
 - f. Music writing materials/programs.
 - g. Worksheets.
 - h. Guest artists.
 - i. Community/school performances.
- 3. Assessment:
 - a. Participation.
 - b. Concert performances.
 - c. Written assignments/exams/reports.
 - d. Playing tests.
 - e. Oral exams.
 - f. Student performances.

STANDARD #7

VII. Students will evaluate music and music performance.

Competency #1 Students will demonstrate the ability to develop criteria for evaluating the quality and effectiveness of musical performances and compositions and apply that criteria in their personal listening and performing.

Competency #2 Students will develop the ability to critically analyze musical performances through the use of appropriate rubrics and personal perceptions.

- 1. Strategies:
 - a. Listening.
 - b. Playing/performing.
 - c. Concert attendance.
 - d. Demonstrations.
 - e. Listening criteria/rubrics.
- 2. Resources:
 - a. World drums.
 - b. Computer technology.
 - c. Unpitched percussion.

- d. Recordings.
 - e. Video materials.
 - f. Community/school performances.
 - g. Guest artists.
 - h. Classroom instruments.
 - i. Internet resources.
3. Assessment:
- a. Participation.
 - b. Concert performances.
 - c. Written/oral exams.
 - d. Assignments/exams/reports.
 - e. Performance evaluations
 - f. Playing tests.

STANDARD #8

VIII. Students will understand relationships between music, the other arts and disciplines outside of the arts.

Competency #1 Students will be exposed to and participate in projects that identify music as a strand of the total concept of content learning.

Competency #2 Students will understand the historical context of music to the other arts' disciplines and disciplines outside of the arts.

- 1. Strategies:
 - a. Collaboration.
 - b. Team teaching/planning.
 - c. Reading/research.
 - d. Interdisciplinary units.
 - e. Concert/event attendance.
 - f. Music in context of humanities.
- 2. Resources:
 - a. Unpitched percussion.
 - b. Visuals.
 - c. Recordings.
 - d. Video materials.
 - e. Community resources.
 - f. Guest artists.
 - g. Classroom instruments.
 - h. Internet resources.
 - i. World drums.

3. Assessment:
 - a. Participation.
 - b. Concert performance.
 - c. Written.
 - d. Assignments/exams/reports.
 - e. Performance evaluations.
 - f. Playing tests.
 - g. Oral exams.

STANDARD #9

XI. Students will understand music in relationship to history, culture, life and work.

Competency #1 Students will demonstrate an awareness of a variety of African musical styles

Competency #2 Students will develop an awareness and an appreciation for African music.

Competency #3 Students will become aware of the career opportunities available to musicians/technicians in the music industry.

1. Strategies:
 - a. Listening.
 - b. Collaboration.
 - c. Concert/event attendance.
2. Resources:
 - a. World drums.
 - b. Unpitched percussion.
 - c. Recordings.
 - d. Video materials.
 - e. Community/school performances.
 - f. Guest artist/lectures.
 - g. Internet resources.
3. Assessment:
 - a. Participation.
 - b. Concert performances.
 - c. Written assignments.
 - d. Playing tests.
 - e. Oral exams.

REFERENCES

Hutchins, Eric. Rhythm Studies. Missoula:
M.C.P.S. 2007

"Jazz in America" "The Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz" 2000- 2007
<http://www.jazzinamerica.org/home.asp>

Keita, Mamady. A Life for the Djembe: Traditional Rhythms of the Manlinke.
Arun- Verlag:4. Auflage 2004.

"National Standards for Arts Education". Copyright © 1994 by Music Educators National
Conference (MENC)
<http://www.menc.org/publication/books/standards.htm>

Schmid, Will. World Music Drumming.: A Cross-Cultural Curriculum.
Milwaukee: Hal Leonard 1998